United Nations A/72/PV.1

General Assembly

Seventy-second session

Official Records

1st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 12 September 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the President of the General Assembly

The President: I declare open the seventy-second session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President: In accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Statement by the President

The President: I am addressing the General Assembly today for the first time as its President. I would like to say once again that this is a great honour for me. I have always believed strongly in the power of multilateralism, and in compromise over conflict. That belief will be tested from time to time during the seventy-second session, but ultimately I am confident that it will be reaffirmed. It is also a great honour for my country, Slovakia. We see it as a testament to our commitment to the values and principles of the United Nations.

I would like to thank my predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson. I feel lucky to be taking the helm of our ship from such an able captain, and I will do my best to maintain the high standards that he has set for the General Assembly's work.

I look forward to working closely with the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, throughout the seventy-second session. The General Assembly will play a vital role in making his vision for a better United Nations — and therefore a better world — a reality. I also look forward to being advised by all of the members. Consultations with Member States will be a standing priority for me and my Office.

The seventy-second session will be a year of firsts. We will negotiate the first intergovernmental compact on migration. We will receive the first report from the Secretary-General and convene the first high-level event based on the landmark resolutions on sustaining peace adopted last year. Soon many States will sign the first agreement on the elimination of nuclear weapons and the first international compact on eliminating sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping.

But this will also be a year of follow-up, and that will arguably be even more important. Firsts bring photographers and celebrations. Follow-up often comes with challenges and complications. Over the coming year, we will have to maintain momentum in implementing and financing the Sustainable Development Goals, and we must work to ensure that the Paris Agreement on Climate Change is integrated

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into national, regional and international frameworks. We must follow up on the commitments we made yesterday with actions today. We cannot let reports or events or resolutions of the past be relegated to the United Nations archives. We must continue to work to implement their recommendations.

Another major item for the seventy-second session is reform of the United Nations. In some ways, such reforms represent a first, and they will indeed mean something new; they will enable the United Nations to work in a way it never has before. However, they also represent follow-up. The United Nations today looks very different from the Organization that was established in 1945. It has been reforming and evolving over the years, and we have seen that through the process of revitalizing the General Assembly. We should therefore see United Nations reform as an opportunity to contribute to an ongoing process, but with a fresh outlook.

I have been reflecting carefully on my priorities as President of the Assembly at its seventy-second session. They have been greatly influenced by consultations with many of our members, and I will outline them in detail at the opening of the general debate next week. Now, however, I would like to speak briefly about a few principles that will guide my work over the coming year.

The first is people. Sometimes the work of the United Nations can be very complex, but the reason it was established is simple. The United Nations was created for people. Its job is to help people who are striving for peace and a decent life on a sustainable planet. The people who need the United Nations the most are not sitting in this Hall today. They are not involved in negotiating resolutions. They do not take the floor at high-level events. It is one of the tasks of the General Assembly to make sure that their voices can still be heard.

The second is balance. It would be impossible to choose only one priority for the United Nations to focus on this year. Opinions would differ from region to region, and indeed from person to person. Someone who has seen rising sea levels threaten to claim their village could say climate change. Someone who has lost a loved one in a bomb blast could say counter-terrorism. Someone who is suffering from persecution for their beliefs could say human rights. During the seventy-second session, I will work towards representing all these viewpoints. There must be balance in the work of the General Assembly.

The third principle is quality. This should be our objective, especially in terms of events. The majority of Member States do not have large representations in New York. Some of them — particularly smaller States — struggle to stay on top of the United Nations busy calendar. For the seventy-second session I intend to have a streamlined agenda, and to avoid placing more burdens on Member States. The quality of dialogue and outcomes is more important than launching new initiatives.

Finally, transparency is a principle I have been committed to throughout my career. I am sure all Members know where my office is on the second floor. My door will always be open to them, even if sometimes I have to close it physically, because I suspect there will be a lot of noise and activity among my team this year. It is open in spirit.

Let us not forget the significance of what we are doing here. Next week, 193 Member States will come together in the Hall. Even representatives of countries with profound disagreements on fundamental issues will sit side by side. We will not all agree. We are likely to hear different — sometimes conflicting — positions expressed from this podium, but I am confident that the overarching principles of the primacy of diplomacy, and mutual respect, will prevail. To help us meet this goal, I suggest one simple rule — to treat every speaker on this podium as if he or she is our own head of delegation. This will not only conserve the dignity of the general debate; it will also allow us to listen, learn and participate to the best possible extent.

We will face many challenges throughout the seventy-second session, but as long as we can all come together here, as long as we can all stand for equal time on this podium, and as long as we can use these meeting rooms to talk to each other and reach compromises in good will, then we all have the collective opportunity to use the United Nations to make the world a better, and more peaceful, place. If we do not do this, the failure will lie with us, not the United Nations.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: Let me begin by once again congratulating our new President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák. He and I have had

good discussions in recent months about our shared hopes for this session. I have no doubt the Assembly is in very capable hands. His experience, his vision and his wisdom are recognized by all of us that have the privilege to know him. I also welcome President Lajčák's choice of theme for the year to come: "Focusing on people: striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet." I look forward to working together for progress on all our areas of work.

Our world faces serious threats — from the proliferation of nuclear weapons to global terrorism, from climate change to inequality. We also face major challenges, from migration to the unintended consequences of technological advances, such as cyberattacks. People around the world are rightly demanding change and looking for Governments and institutions to deliver. We all agree that the United Nations must do even more to adapt and deliver. That is the aim of the reform proposals that this Assembly will consider. I look forward to working with the President and representatives to strengthen our Organization to better support the Member States and to produce better results for the people we serve.

One key change, within and beyond the United Nations, must be to empower the world's women and girls. Yesterday, I launched a road map for achieving gender parity throughout the United Nations, at all levels. I appeal to delegations to put forward women candidates for vacancies. Parity at the United Nations will improve performance at the United Nations.

Despite today's conflicts and the grinding daily impact of poverty, I remain convinced that this is far more an era of transformational potential. May the seventy-second session of the General Assembly take bold steps to seize those opportunities as we continue to serve "we the peoples".

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Item 141 of the provisional agenda

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/72/380)

The President: I should like, in keeping with established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/72/380. It contains a letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that four Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I would like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years".

May I take it that the General Assembly takes note of the information contained in document A/72/380?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the seventy-second session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly at the beginning of each session shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that, for the seventy-second session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: Cabo Verde, China, Dominica, Indonesia, Ireland, the Russian Federation, Uganda, Uruguay and the United States of America.

May I take it that the States that I have just mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

The President: Delegations are reminded that credentials should be submitted to the Office of Legal Affairs, as announced in *The Journal of the United Nations*.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Organization of work of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly

Letter from the Chair of the Committee on Conferences (A/72/376)

The President: The Assembly will now turn its attention to document A/72/376, which contains a letter dated 5 September 2017 from the Chair of the Committee on Conferences addressed to the President of the General Assembly. Members are aware that, pursuant to section 1, paragraph 7, of Assembly resolution 40/243, of 18 December 1985, no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly should be permitted to meet at United Nations Headquarters during the main part of a regular session of the Assembly, unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

On the strict understanding that meetings would have to be accommodated within available facilities and services, authorization is thus sought for the following subsidiary organs: the Committee on Relations with the Host Country; the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund; the Independent Audit Advisory Committee; and the Assembly of State Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to authorize those subsidiary organs of the Assembly to meet during the main part of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 3.20 p.m.